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THE MILITARY-POLITICAL LINKAGE IN  
COALITION WARFARE: A KOREAN CASE STUDY

by

Major Thomas Schmidt  
Military Intelligence

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School of Advanced Military Studies  
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College  
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examines the war in four phases. In each phase ROK and US political goals are compared, military operations reviewed and a determination made as to whether military operations supported political goals of that phase. This methodology leads to the conclusion that the failure of the military, notably McArthur, to understand and/or accept the concept of limited war and the restraints it entails unnecessarily widened and prolonged the war.

The implications for the military leader are clear. The link between military operations and political ends must be firmly established and clearly understood. The military must willingly subordinate itself to the political leadership of the country. Failure to do so creates a tension between the military and political elements, which must be in harmony. The result is failure in both the political and military realms. Conversely, a balance between the military and political concerns increases the ability of both to succeed.

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Approved by:

*Alvin Washington* Monograph Director  
Lieutenant Colonel Alvin Washington

*L. D. Holder* Director, School  
Colonel L. D. Holder of Advanced  
Military Studies

*Philip J. Brookes* Director, Graduate  
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D. Degree Programs

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## ABSTRACT

THE MILITARY-POLITICAL LINKAGE IN COALITION WARFARE. A KOREAN CASE STUDY by MAJ Thomas Schmidt, USA, 39 pages.

This monograph examines the linkage between military operations and political goals in the setting of coalition warfare. The next war for the US Army is likely to be fought for limited ends, with limited resources and limited freedom of action. The military commander must be able to plan operations which support the nation's political aims. He must further do so with the scarce resources made available to him and within the restraints placed upon his freedom of action by political decisionmakers. At the same time he must be able to reconcile US goals with those of the other member(s) of the coalition within which the US is fighting.

The Korean War provides an excellent vehicle for examining the military-political relationship as well as the friction caused by differences within an alliance. The monograph begins by tracing the evolution of US strategy and foreign policy to determine US reasons for entering the war. It then examines the war in four phases. In each phase ROK and US political goals are compared, military operations reviewed, and a determination made as to whether military operations supported the political objectives of that phase. This methodology leads to the conclusion that the failure of the military, notably MacArthur, to understand and/or accept the concept of limited war and the restraints it entails unnecessarily widened and prolonged the war? (KR). *(South Korea)*

The implications for the military leader are clear. The link between military operations and political aims must be firmly established and clearly understood. The military must willingly subordinate itself to the political leadership of this country. Failure to do so creates a tension between the military and political elements, which must be in harmony. The result is failure in both the political and military realms. Conversely, a balance between the military and political concerns increases the ability of both to succeed.

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## I. Introduction.

While attempting to explain the nature of warfare Carl von Clausewitz writes that "war is a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. ... The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose." <sup>1</sup> United States Army doctrine echoes this belief. FM 100-1, The Army, states that:

"Since war is primarily a politically directed act for political ends, the conduct of a war, in terms of strategy and constraints, is defined primarily by its political objectives."

and goes on to say that:

"Since military forces are instruments of political purpose, the military goal must be to further that purpose. Such requirements and limitations as are inherent or implied in political purposes must also be reflected in military missions and tasks." <sup>2</sup>

Clearly it is the intention of the US Army to subordinate itself to the political leadership of this country.

But the United States will not establish political objectives for a future war by itself. US security strategy is based in large part on collective security. Through numerous multinational and bilateral defense treaties, the US has committed itself to coalition warfare. The interests of



alliance members will dictate political objectives. The mere existence of the treaty demonstrates a common purpose -- the national security of the countries involved. However, it would be naive to assume that this common purpose manifests itself in identical goals. Insofar as the alliance can satisfy the various interests of the nations involved, it remains viable. When interests or goals diverge, the alliance is strained. When the divergence becomes too great, the alliance collapses.

In a total war where the national existence of the alliance members may be in jeopardy their goal -- survival -- is unlikely to change. However, the beginning of the atomic age has also signaled the beginning of the age of limited war. Though the issue is still debated, US policymakers generally accept the fact that a total war involving strategic nuclear exchange will not have a "winner". The US strategic nuclear arsenal is maintained as a deterrent, directed primarily against the Soviet Union. Recognizing the danger of an overreliance on nuclear weapons, US policymakers have developed a strategy of flexible response. Any threat to US national security will be met with sufficient strength to eliminate it. While recognizing the possibility of escalation to the strategic nuclear level, this strategy favors resolution of conflict, even a war, by means short of nuclear weapons. By definition, such conflicts or wars would be "limited".

Limited war is defined as an "armed conflict between two or more nations at an intensity below that of general (total)

war, where means and/or ends are constrained.". \* It is in a limited war that national interests are most likely to diverge to the point of rendering the alliance ineffective. A nation can compromise if its ends are less vital than national survival, particularly as its means are diminished in the course of the conflict. Preserving the alliance must be a consideration of the military planner as he establishes military ends and expends given resources.

If engaged in war in the future, the US is most likely to wage limited war as part of an alliance. The political objectives of the alliance members will dictate the desired ends and the means available to the military. The military planner must then design a strategy to meet those ends and military operations which support that strategy. Further, he must do so with those means given him and within those constraints imposed by the political leadership. While the military leader may consider this detrimental or even meddlesome, subordination of the military to the political is a fundamental characteristic of US national defense policy.

The challenge for the military theater commander is to develop a military strategy which supports the political ends of not just the US, but of all alliance members. His campaign plans must establish both the vertical link between operations and strategy and the horizontal link between the varied aims of the coalition. He must be able to judge the political as well as the military impact of his actions. Particularly in a limited war he must constantly keep in mind the dominance of political considerations over purely

military effectiveness. The most efficient and direct plan for defeating the enemy may not be politically affordable. In the words of FM 100-1, The Army, " Successful strategy achieves national and alliance objectives at the lowest possible cost in lives and money. " \*

How can the military commander link politics, strategy, and operations in coalition warfare waged for limited political and military ends? The Korean War provides an excellent vehicle for examining this question. It was a fairly large scale, high intensity war, yet certainly limited in both ends and means. The dominating personality and distinguished military reputation of General Douglas MacArthur resulted in his becoming a focal point of alliance military and political affairs to a greater degree than commanders in more recent conflicts. The scale of the conflict insures adequate examples of the tensions between military and political considerations and between differing national objectives. The focus of responsibilities in the person of General MacArthur facilitates an analysis of the decisions made and their political and military outcomes. To be judged successful, a military campaign must support political ends, maintain the cohesion of the alliance, and remain within the given constraints and restraints. The successes and failures of the Korean War can provide valuable insights for the conduct of limited coalition warfare in the future.

II. Development of United States Military Strategy From WW II to the Korean War.

Not quite five years elapsed between the Allied victory in WW II and the outbreak of the Korean War. Yet in those five years the international political and military environment changed drastically. US policymakers were still struggling to develop strategies to deal with expanded national interests, a new and growing threat, and an unprecedented competition for limited resources.

The US attitude regarding its position in world affairs immediately after WW II can be described as euphoric. It had just played a major role in winning the conventional war in Europe. The atomic bomb had brought about the surrender of Japan without a costly invasion of the home islands. Remaining military powers had been allies in the recent war and were not viewed as threats. The American public eagerly awaited the demobilization of the armed forces. The US had proven itself a world leader in both the industrial and military arenas. Reorienting its wartime industry to peacetime production would preserve its place in the former while its nuclear monopoly would insure dominance in the latter.

Both the long awaited peace and sole possession of nuclear weapons encouraged the US' headlong rush to demobilize. Public opinion demanded the return of our servicemen from overseas where, it was felt, they had done their job and were no longer needed. The nuclear monopoly would allow the US to enforce peace by threatening potential aggressors. The military would need only a means to deliver

the bomb. Policymakers considered strategic bombers as the obvious choice. The ground and naval forces could be substantially reduced without great danger to national security. \*

While the US looked forward to decades of peace, the Soviet Union seized the opportunity to consolidate its hold on the occupied nations of eastern Europe. Reluctantly, the US began to recognize the threat posed by Soviet expansionism. Writing as "Mr X", George F Kennan, director of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, published an article proposing a strategy of containment to counter this threat. \* In March 1947, President Truman articulated what soon became known as the Truman Doctrine:

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting armed subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressure. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their destinies in their own way." \*

In the next several years containment and the Truman Doctrine successfully staved off attempts to increase the influence of communism in Iran and Turkey, overthrow the government of Greece, and force the western allies out of Berlin by blockading land routes into the city.

In 1949 the Soviet Union broke the US monopoly in atomic weapons, successfully testing their own nuclear device in August of that year. A few months later Mao's communist insurgency in China drove the nationalist forces from the

mainland and established the People's Republic of China. These two events energized the US national security community to reevaluate the worldwide threat to US interests. Monolithic communism armed with atomic weapons posed a far greater threat than did the conventionally armed Soviet Union. National Security Council Document number 68 (NSC-68) examined the Soviet threat and outlined possible countermeasures. Despite overestimating Soviet ability to dictate policy to China, the conclusions of NSC-68 were a driving force behind US foreign policy well into the 70's, perhaps until today. Recognizing a global struggle between the Soviets and the US, NSC 68 recommended a continued nuclear deterrent to global war and a rapid and substantial buildup of conventional forces to engage in limited wars below the nuclear threshold. \*

To reestablish the deterrent value of the US nuclear arsenal, Truman authorized development of the hydrogen bomb. However, policymakers recognized that the bomb itself would deter primarily other bombs. \* To be able to deal with the Soviets from a position of strength would require far more conventional force than was feasible for the US at that time. Collective security arrangements, sought by the US since the end of the war, became a necessity in the face of a growing and increasingly aggressive threat. The US still hoped that the United Nations would provide the ultimate vehicle for collective security. However, it felt that Europe must be developed as an essential counterweight to growing Soviet military, economic, and industrial power. \* Policy toward

this end included the Marshall Plan and the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In the Pacific arena, the US determined to accelerate the peace accords with Japan and end the occupation as quickly as possible. Though stability and growth in the Pacific area were important, Europe was the obvious first priority.

In the context of this strategy, the United States was confronted with the North Korean invasion of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Europe, where NATO and the Marshall Plan were being implemented, was the obvious centerpiece of US foreign policy. In public statements the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, outlined a Pacific defense perimeter which excluded both Taiwan and the ROK.<sup>11</sup> In regard to the situation of the Nationalist Chinese, he confirmed that the US had no intention of becoming involved in a civil war on the Asian land mass. One week later on 19 January 1950 the US House of Representatives defeated a bill renewing economic and military aid to the ROK.<sup>12</sup> In March Secretary Acheson commented that the security of the ROK could not be guaranteed. In May the Senate Foreign Relations Committee added their opinion that in the event of a major war the ROK could not be defended.<sup>13</sup> By June of 1950 both houses of congress as well as the executive branch of the US government had taken public positions which apparently abandoned the ROK to the whims of the communist world.

On 25 June North Korea acted on the basis of this perception, crossing the 38th parallel and beginning the Korean War. US reaction was swift and unexpected. Within

days the US had committed itself to defending the sovereignty of the ROK and had successfully championed the cause of the ROK in the United Nations (UN). Though this reaction apparently surprised North Korea and her patron, the USSR, it shouldn't have. Public statements aside, the US had as recently as 14 June assured the ROK of its support in the event of communist aggression. " The decision to intervene in the ROK was not a radical new direction in foreign policy. Rather, it confirmed US commitment to a strategy of containment. The false sense of security felt by the North Koreans can be blamed on a misinterpretation of public statements. In hindsight it is clear that in the event of global war the low priority of the ROK would prevent the US from actively participating in its defense. Limited resources would be needed first in Europe. In the Pacific the US would be forced to regroup initially on a defensive perimeter previously described as excluding the ROK. However, the Korean issue arose not as part of a global war but as a limited attempt to expand communist influence. US resources were judged adequate to meet this limited challenge. More importantly, US demonstrated the will to counter this attempt at expansion.

In Washington five possible interpretations for the North Korean invasion were discussed:

- The invasion was intended to divert US attention from Europe, paving the way for subsequent aggression in that theater.
- The communists view the Korean peninsula as a soft spot



in the Pacific and were moving to fill a power vacuum.

-- The Soviets were testing US resolve. Success in the ROK would encourage subsequent attempts to expand elsewhere.

-- The ROK was being used to demonstrate Soviet strength and US weakness to the world.

-- The move was part of the Soviet Far East strategy designed to keep Japan out of the western bloc.<sup>15</sup>

All of these interpretations assumed a unified communist bloc dominated by Moscow. The possibility that North Korea was acting on its own initiative was not seriously considered.

No matter which interpretation is accepted the US decision to intervene was fully in keeping with both the strategy of containment and the Truman Doctrine. There were several specific reasons for the US reaction. The strategy of containment assumed that the non-communist west would participate in collective security efforts. As the leader of the west the US would have to demonstrate its determination to participate in these efforts. Korea was its first test. Much of the US hope for viable collective security arrangements lay in the UN. The UN had guaranteed the sovereignty of the ROK. To allow the ROK to fall would be tantamount to admitting the impotence of the UN as an instrument of collective security. Korea provided a buffer between the communist powers on the Asian mainland and Japan. Loss of South Korea would place Japan in a precarious position. Finally, the prestige of US friendship was being challenged. The perceived abandonment of the nationalist Chinese government had eroded the west's confidence in US

security guarantees and had given rise to domestic political opposition claims that the Truman administration was soft on communism.<sup>16</sup> In summary, the US international and domestic political situations dictated a rapid response to this communist aggression despite the fact that the US military capability to engage in a limited conventional war had been significantly degraded by an overreliance on nuclear weapons and the politically motivated post WW II demobilization. From the outset of the Korean War it was clear that political objectives would dominate military considerations.

### III. Opening Stages of the Conflict.

When the equivalent of eight divisions of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) crossed the 38th parallel on 25 June 1950 their objective was the destruction of the ROK Army (ROKA) and the reunification of the Korean peninsula under the communist government of North Korea. ROK policy at this time was a near mirror image. Under the leadership of the intensely nationalistic President Syngman Rhee the ROK continued to agitate for a unified Korea in their case under the government of the south. The North Korean claim that their attack was merely a preemption may not have been just rhetoric on their part. There is little doubt that given the military capability, President Rhee would have strongly considered a conquest of the north.

The sad state of Rhee's military precluded any thought

of offensive action. However, the rapid collapse of even their ability to defend was not anticipated. The war for the ROKA quickly degenerated into a chaotic withdrawal, if not outright flight. Despite numerous courageous actions by individual units, it soon became apparent that the ROKA could not contain the threat. The ROK government rapidly lost all ability to exercise options. Their courses of action were forced upon them by the North Korean success.

Politically, the ROK realized that outside assistance would be vital to maintain their existence. To this end the role of the military was to buy time for the government to obtain this assistance. The ROK appealed directly to the US and through the UN to the other nations of the free world. The ROKA, despite a relatively simple and straightforward task, was unable to coordinate its efforts. Although inadequate arms, equipment and training contributed to its rapid defeat, it was the lack of an adequate command and control system that precluded the centralized planning and control that may have made a difference. The ROKA was never able to establish a coherent defensive line. Their efforts, though heroic, remained fragmented. While its political masters sought outside help to insure continued existence, the ROKA fled southward under constant pressure from the NKPA.

For reasons already mentioned the US decided to intervene in the ROK. It further championed the ROK cause in the UN, resulting in a UN resolution also guaranteeing the security of the ROK and pledging unified action to restore

the territory of the ROK if it became necessary.<sup>17</sup> While exerting diplomatic pressure on North Korea and its allies, primarily through the UN, the US began to implement a series of unilateral military actions which rapidly escalated to the commitment of US ground forces in the ROK.

Under the auspices of a strategy of containment the US political objective in the ROK was to preserve the government, defeat communist aggression, demonstrate the viability of collective security in the context of the UN, and reinforce its position of leadership in the free world. It was further committed to limiting the conflict. President Truman stated in his memoirs that he was motivated to intervene in the ROK by a desire to avoid WW III.<sup>18</sup> Quick, decisive action would prevent the spread of communist aggression to other parts of Asia and the world.

General Douglas MacArthur was sent to the ROK to evaluate the situation firsthand and recommend a military strategy to meet these political ends. MacArthur recognized the inability of the ROKA to conduct a protracted defense of the peninsula. US air and naval power had helped the situation, but were not enough to tip the scales in favor of the ROK. US ground forces must be committed to slow the N-KPA advance. This would allow the ROKA to conduct a more orderly withdrawal into a defensive perimeter around the port city of Pusan. Follow-on US forces would assist in securing this perimeter and begin a buildup for an eventual counteroffensive. Within this perimeter the ROKA would be reorganized, equipped and trained to the point where they

could participate in this counteroffensive.

Initial US military actions toward this goal consisted of air support of the ROKA. At first support was limited to south of the 38th parallel. Within a day this area was expanded to include military targets in North Korea. Naval forces protected the coastline and provided fire support when able. In the interest of limiting the conflict naval forces were also positioned to prevent an invasion of Taiwan. A suggestion to blockade the entire coast of China was rejected as being too provocative.

Ground forces were introduced in a piecemeal fashion, beginning with the battalion sized Task Force Smith. Though militarily suspect, this piecemeal deployment was a concrete action in support of stated political goals. It demonstrated US resolve to the ROK, the communist bloc and the free world. The rapid commitment of US forces was instrumental in gaining UN military support for the ROK. Despite early defeats US forces did sufficiently bolster the ROKA capabilities to permit the formation of the Pusan defensive enclave. While air power significantly degraded North Korea's ability to sustain their offensive deep in the south, ground forces provided desperately needed firepower, especially artillery, and armor. In combination US air and ground combat power stopped the NKPA advance.

Within the relatively secure defensive perimeter General MacArthur, now commander in chief of UN forces, began to build up forces and design the plan for a counteroffensive. President Rhee placed the Korean armed

forces under UN command on 15 July. The UN in turn made the US its executive agent for the prosecution of UN policy in the ROK.

By early August the situation, though still dangerous, had stabilized. The ROK government remained a viable entity, at least in the eyes of the western world. UN forces (still exclusively US and ROK) under the unified command of General MacArthur, held an enclave centered around Pusan. Supplies, equipment and reinforcements were pouring into Pusan. The imminent collapse of the ROK had been staved off. UN forces had time to organize and plan future actions.

In these opening stages of the war US and ROK political goals were in harmony. The ROK sought continued existence and outside assistance to guarantee continued existence. The US, in the larger framework of its strategy of containment, provided this guarantee and successfully represented the ROK cause in the UN.

Militarily the ROKA sought to stop the NKPA advance, retaining as much of the territory as possible. To have any chance of success they needed additional firepower and, after early disasters, a boost in morale. US forces, initially air and soon to include ground forces, provided the firepower and, by their presence alongside the ROKA, strengthened the will of the Korean soldier and his leaders. In the Pusan perimeter, the military had a relatively secure base in which to reorganize, build up combat power and plan future operations.

In this phase of the Korean War military actions

successfully secured political objectives. Within the constraints of limiting the war to the Korean peninsula, US and ROK forces had stopped the North Korean aggression. With the survival of the ROK government and the commitment of the UN to its continued survival, both ROK and US goals had been met.

#### IV. Inchon and Pursuit to the Yalu.

Despite intense efforts by the NKPA to shatter the perimeter in the first week of September, Pusan held. The ROK government and the UN foothold on Korea remained secure. Thoughts turned to future actions. A counteroffensive was inevitable. Politically and militarily the status quo was unacceptable to both the US and the ROK. US strategy of containment demanded that UN forces push the NKPA back to the pre-war border. The American people and the world would view anything less as a failure of containment and collective security and, conversely, a success for communist expansion.

US policymakers had already begun to grapple with the question of crossing the 38th parallel. On the one hand, crossing the pre-war border could reasonably provoke Chinese or Soviet entry into the war. Advocates of restraint argued that the risk was not worth the potential gain. They also pointed out that the UN and US would be changing the purpose to which they first entered the conflict without significantly increasing the means and ways available. On the other hand, supporters of crossing the parallel

maintained that failure to do so would not ultimately solve the problem. The North Korean aggressors would be free to regroup and try again some other day. This debate between those favoring containment and those calling for a "rollback" of communism concluded with a compromise. NSC 81/1 stated that "the UN purpose in Korea was to bring about the complete independence and unity of that country".<sup>19</sup> However, the document went on to qualify that authority to order the crossing of the 38th parallel rested solely in the president and would go no further than to conclude that UN forces could "expect authority" to be granted. NSC 81/1 did not give MacArthur the green light, but it did considerably limit the president's freedom of action. Were he to prevent crossing the border, he would be going against the advice of the national security experts in his own administration.

Stated US and UN policy at this time was still limited to regaining the original territory of the ROK and restoring peace to the region. Truman and the US insisted on limiting the war to the Korean peninsula. By refusing to order full mobilization Truman sought to have life in the US continue "as usual". In effect this limited the size of the US/UN force which in turn limited the scale and scope of UN operations. With this restraint, Truman hoped to minimize the perceived threat to China and the USSR. Though sentiment in the administration leaned toward reunification by military force, Truman refused to articulate it as the official war aim of the US/UN.

The ROK faced no such dichotomy of opinion. For Syngman



Rhee the question of whether or not to cross the 38th parallel required no debate whatsoever. On 8 September the ROK ambassador to the US, Dr John Chang, clearly stated the ROK goals: "...the complete destruction of the NKPA and unification of Korea under the existing southern government.".

This difference of strategy between the US and the ROK had no effect on the planning and conduct of Operation Chromite, the amphibious landing at Inchon, and the concurrent breakout from the Pusan perimeter by the Eighth US Army. MacArthur envisioned an end run which would secure Seoul and at the same time sever the supply lines and channels of communication of the NKPA. Concurrently UN forces under the Eighth US Army would attack out of the Pusan perimeter. The NKPA would be caught in a pincer with UN forces attacking their front and rear simultaneously.

The operation was an unqualified success. Overcoming the many doubts of superiors and subordinates alike, MacArthur carried off the landing at Inchon, achieving complete operational surprise. By the end of September the ROK government was again functioning from Seoul. UN forces from Pusan had effected a linkup with the amphibious assault forces, the original territory of the ROK was in UN hands and the NKPA was in full retreat across the entire front.

General MacArthur's operation had at this juncture succeeded in accomplishing the political and military goals originally set. The NKPA was defeated and driven from the south. The ROK government was in control of its previous

territory and UN forces were in place to see that it remained so. China and the USSR had declined to become involved in combat and the war remained limited. In regard to domestic US politics, MacArthur had designed a plan which offered a decisive victory in relatively quick fashion. He realized that a long war of attrition required mobilization, which Truman wanted to avoid. Now was the time for cease fire talks to begin.

Unfortunately, now was also the time when UN and ROK interests began to diverge and military circumstances dominated political decisions. Rhee had never compromised on his desire to unify Korea. Shortly after Inchon he declared his intention to advance to the Manchurian border, "regardless of what the UN Command decided".<sup>21</sup> By 1 October, ROKA forces had crossed the 38th parallel and were continuing the pursuit of the NKPA.

General MacArthur was an outspoken supporter of Rhee. His daring success at Inchon added considerably to his already formidable influence in policymaking. When a complete victory over the communist aggressors appeared to be within grasp, the US people, media, and both houses of Congress quickly made their preferences known. Most echoed Rhee's sentiments that the North Korean attack proved the true nature of the communist regime in the north and that any settlement which included a divided Korea was an invitation to a repeat of the war sometime in the future.<sup>22</sup> Faced with a fait accompli by the ROKA and overwhelming public support for a continuation of the war into the north, Truman

authorized operations across the 38th parallel. By 7 October the UN General Assembly had concurred and issued a new resolution calling for the reunification of Korea. <sup>23</sup>

While the desired political and military end states of the war had changed, the conditions for conducting the war had not. It was still clearly UN and US policy to limit the war. The US still resisted mobilization. The threat of Chinese or Soviet intervention haunted every political decision regarding the conduct of the war. It was only after repeated assurances that neither the Chinese nor the Soviets would intervene that Truman authorized MacArthur to continue the pursuit of the NKPA. The message authorizing these operations contained detailed instructions intended to prevent a direct confrontation between UN/US and Chinese or Soviet forces. Operations were authorized only if:

"at the time of such operation there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist Forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea. Under no circumstances, however, will your forces cross the Manchurian or USSR borders of Korea and, as a matter of policy, no non-Korean ground forces will be used in the northeast provinces bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border. Furthermore, support of your operations north or south of the 38th Parallel will not include air or naval action against Manchuria or against USSR territory." <sup>24</sup>

In short, the war had expanded to North Korea, but MacArthur had no more forces and no fewer restrictions as a result.

From this point on the war became much more complicated. US and UN policy had been changed to agree with military capabilities and the obsession of the Korean president. The apparent harmony between military operations and political goals and between the US and ROK goals was merely a facade which would soon begin to crumble. Reunification was the only common thread. Rhee expected reunification under his government while the US and UN were planning on new elections in the unified nation. MacArthur had already shown a proclivity to go public when he disagreed with Washington's policies -- e.g. support of Formosa. He had also proven himself to be uncomfortable with the concept of limited war and bridled at restrictions placed on the military for political reasons -- e.g. inability to blockade China. In the atmosphere of success immediately after Inchon these tensions did not come to light. Their later consequences proved tragic.

As he prepared to cross the 38th parallel, MacArthur was already searching for an excuse to circumvent the clear intent of the JCS message authorizing him to cross. The excuse came in the form of a message from the new Secretary of State, General George Marshall, which included the phrase, "We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically, to proceed north of the 38th Parallel.". The next day he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he "considered all of Korea open for our military operations.". As the JCS did not challenge this interpretation, MacArthur proceeded as he saw fit.

It is surely an unhappy coincidence that just as the political-military linkage began to break down MacArthur's military genius began to show signs of decline. He planned another amphibious assault on the east coast of Korea at Wonsan, hoping to trap fleeing NKPA elements. However, the logistic effort required to load, transport, and land the X Corps was so great that it inevitably detracted from 8th Army's ability to continue the pursuit. In any event, the trap closed too slowly. The ROKA had secured Wonsan by the time X Corps landed. MacArthur was left with UN forces separated by nearly the entire width of the country competing for both combat support and combat service support. Both units suffered as a result, 8th Army more so than X Corps. Nevertheless, the UN advance through North Korea was swift, even by modern standards. By 24 October the NKPA had been thoroughly routed. MacArthur issued orders making the Yalu River the next objective line.

Since crossing the 38th parallel MacArthur had been interpreting directives as he saw fit, ignoring restraints that he found inconvenient. Citing "military necessity", he informed the JCS of his intention to disregard the restraints imposed by the 27 September directive. <sup>26</sup> Specifically, he had no intention of using only ROK troops in the border provinces of North Korea. It was the mission of the UN forces to clear out North Korea and unify the nation. He could not accomplish this using only the ROKA. <sup>27</sup> While the Truman administration sought desperately to reassure the Chinese of its good will and limited objectives, MacArthur downplayed

the likelihood of intervention and proceeded with a course of action most likely to precipitate that intervention. The Chinese fear of foreign troops on their soil was well known. While they would perhaps accept ROK troops on the Yalu, they certainly would not welcome the combined forces of the UN. Mao had ample reason to distrust the intentions of MacArthur.

o Truman's inability to control

His past and continued statements and actions demonstrated to M

his general. This perception did nothing to enhance the credibility of the administration's assurances to China and MacArthur did nothing to alleviate this perception. The linkage between political goal and military operations was beginning to stretch. When the Chinese Army launched a major counteroffensive on 26 November, the linkage snapped. The UN was entering into "an entirely new war" <sup>22</sup> precipitated by military actions which disregarded political restraints.

In this phase the political goals of both the US and the ROK were to reunify the peninsula under a single democratic government. Though the US and the UN did not share Rhee's assumption that the north would simply be absorbed into the present ROK structure, this disagreement never had to be resolved. The US policy of avoiding Chinese and Soviet involvement in the war was another matter. MacArthur's military strategy was to destroy and drive out all communist forces from North Korea. In his efforts to do so he pushed UN and US forces beyond the limits set by political policy. While the strategy supported the goal of unification of Korea, violation of restraints led directly to Chinese intervention. This intervention, in turn, precluded

reunification of Korea and allowed the NKPA to reorganize behind friendly lines. Though the military ends supported the political goals, the ways and means employed exceeded established limits and led to the failure of both military and political strategies.

#### V. Chinese Intervention.

The massive counteroffensive by Chinese "volunteers" forced both a political and military reassessment of the situation. Politically, the Chinese action caused near paralysis. Though the war had already expanded beyond desirable limits, policymakers searched frantically for a course of action which would halt the movement toward global war. Militarily, US and UN forces sought principally to stave off complete defeat.

In the face of the Chinese military success, the UN quickly abandoned -- in practice -- its goal of reunifying Korea. Within weeks the other principal members of the UN Command in Korea (Great Britain and France) were urging the US to seek a cease-fire and subsequent negotiations which would satisfy the original UN resolution calling for the expulsion of communist forces from South Korea and guaranteeing the security of the ROK. While agreeing to negotiations in principle, the US resisted any suggestion of rewarding the Chinese for their aggression. Limiting the war to Korea still formed the cornerstone of US policy. It felt

that allowing China to gain from her actions -- e.g. UN membership in return for a cease-fire -- would merely encourage further communist aggression throughout the world. The US recognized the need to restate its political objectives for the war. However, the uncertain military situation prevented it from formulating a clear idea of what it could hope to achieve. Only when the military situation had stabilized several months later did the US clearly state its political goals of the war which now involved the Chinese Communist government.

The ROK government became a nearly impotent bystander in the policy debates that followed the Chinese intervention. Rhee refused to abandon his goal of reunification, however unlikely the reality of such an end state became. Earlier in the war he had influenced US policy by sending ROKA forces across the 38th parallel. Presented with a fait accompli the US and UN came out in support of military operations into North Korea and adjusted their goals to include reunification of Korea. In this case, however, Rhee's military forces proved as impotent as his political influence. Unable to conduct independent military operations against overwhelming numbers of Chinese, Rhee had to accept US military decisions and subordinate his political aspirations to the military reality.

As the policymakers waited for the military situation to become clearer the military was waiting for a clear policy statement from Washington. Did the US intend to leave Korea? Defend for a limited time? Defend indefinitely? The answer



would dictate long range military plans for Korea. In the absence of an answer Generals MacArthur and Ridgway -- the new commander of 8th Army -- continued to delay in successive positions, inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy while keeping major UN forces intact.<sup>20</sup> In effect, the military was buying time for the politicians to formulate a policy to deal with the Chinese.

By January General Ridgway had gained sufficient control of the situation to begin offensive operations, though very limited at first. His success was a great boost for spirits back in Washington, where the situation had appeared nearly hopeless. Ridgway continued to lead 8th Army in a careful, methodical advance northwards, recrossing the Han River and liberating Seoul on 18 March 1951.

Meanwhile, MacArthur had been advocating several changes to US policy toward China. He requested permission to institute a naval blockade of China, use Nationalist Chinese troops in Korea, support Nationalist Chinese operations on the mainland as a diversion, and initiate a bombing campaign against targets in China. He considered the Chinese intervention as a declaration of war and could conceive of no reason to respect the Chinese border as a limit to military operations.<sup>21</sup> The US still sought to limit the war to Korea. It chose to officially believe the Chinese claim that its forces were volunteers. This technicality justified the denial of MacArthur's requests. The actions he advocated were deemed to provocative toward China and the USSR. The military advantages of these courses of action were secondary

to the political necessity of limiting the war. MacArthur could never quite accept the concept of limited war or abandon the idea of operations against the Chinese homeland. When he issued a statement on 24 March offering to negotiate with the Chinese commander and threatening China itself should these negotiations fail.<sup>22</sup> President Truman made the decision to relieve MacArthur of his command. LTG Ridgway, who had by now led 8th Army to strong defensible positions beyond the 38th parallel, was appointed to succeed MacArthur.

Now that military disaster had been averted the US was able to articulate a clear policy. Secretary of State Marshall declared that the US objectives were to defeat aggression, restore peace, and confine the conflict.<sup>23</sup> The US had admitted that it could not unify Korea militarily.<sup>24</sup> As UN forces now occupied more or less the original territory of South Korea, aggression had been defeated. The conflict had so far been confined to Korea. From its current position of strength, the US could afford to negotiate a peace. After a major offensive failed in June 1951, the Chinese agreed to Soviet proposed cease-fire talks which began on 10 July.

The Chinese intervention had forced the US to adjust its political goals. A negotiated peace with both North Korea and South Korea remaining intact was now acceptable. The military had avoided defeat and under the leadership of Ridgway had regained the initiative and retaken most of South Korea and parts of North Korea. By forgoing certain military actions the US had limited the war. Despite restraints imposed on them, UN troops forced the Chinese to the

negotiating table. Military operations had successfully supported US and UN policy goals. Though the ROK objective remained a unified Korea, they were unable to pursue an independent policy. It was in their best interests to cooperate with the UN. They had no other viable choices. In short, military operations successfully supported political goals and coalition objectives were compatible though not identical.

#### VI. Stalemate and Truce.

Neither political objectives nor military positions changed significantly over the next two years. The US and through it the UN continued to seek a negotiated peace without appeasing the communists. Rhee and the ROK government decried the negotiations and demanded a unified Korea, all to no effect. UN forces defended, attacked or counterattacked with little net gain or loss of territory. The negotiations went on.

The US goal of a negotiated peace which guaranteed the survival of the ROK survived a change of administrations. Though Syngman Rhee hoped that President Eisenhower would renew efforts to militarily unify Korea, this was not to be. The Republican administration was just as eager to end the war as the democratic one had been.

General Clark, Ridgway's replacement as UN commander, summarized his military strategy as follows:

"( It is ) not our policy to seek a

military decision. ( We ) must make the stalemate more expensive for the communists than for us. Hit them where it hurts, worry them, convince them by force that the price tag for armistice is going up, not down." 38

UN forces were largely successful holding their positions. Offensive actions were carefully limited in scope so as not to threaten Chinese or North Korean vital interests. The ROKA continued to cooperate with UN command. Again, they had little alternative.

The ROK government, on the other hand, made every effort to derail the talks. Fortunately the Chinese did not take South Korean threats of unilateral military action seriously. A more serious threat to the peace talks occurred when the ROKA released over 27,000 communist prisoners of war whom the Chinese had insisted be repatriated. Only Eisenhower's threat to cut off virtually all US assistance now and for the foreseeable future subdued Rhee. Though not renouncing his goal of a united Korea, he did temper his public remarks and ceased to sabotage the negotiations actively.

Following the policy outlined in General Clark's remarks, UN forces successfully supported political objectives. They did not lose enough to give the Chinese a negotiating advantage, nor did they win so much as to threaten the continuation of the talks. ROK and US political objectives were not compatible at this stage. However, the US so dominated the alliance that ROK objections were practically irrelevant. ROK acquiescence was eventually obtained through offers of economic assistance and a promised

mutual defense treaty. Hostilities initiated on 25 June 1950 ended with the signing of a truce on 27 July 1953. Though the UN resolution calling for free elections to unify Korea remains in effect, most nations accept the reality of a divided Korea.

## VII. Conclusions.

The Korean War began when communist North Korea attempted to subjugate democratic South Korea by force of arms. In the context of a strategy of containment, the US became involved in that war. Though of little value in a global war, Korea became a symbol of collective security through the auspices of the UN. The struggle in Korea had many world-wide implications for the US. For the ROK the implications were purely survival as a political entity. Throughout the conflict, the ROK goal of survival was a subset of US policy. Hence the two nations worked in harmony. When US and ROK objectives diverged the US was able to control the behavior of the ROK, if not its thinking.

For a short time, the US adopted the ROK goal of unification. This goal eventually came into conflict with the more important policy ( to the US ) of limiting the war to the Korean peninsula. When efforts to unify Korea caused Chinese intervention, the goal of a unified Korea was abandoned by the US. The ROK was unable to pursue unification unilaterally. In time, the ROK agreed to a negotiated truce in return for guaranteed security.

Military operations were planned in support of political goals throughout the war. In each phase the military goal supported the desired political end state. The great failure of the military involved not an inability to design operations to achieve the necessary political objective, but rather the inability to accept political restraints inherent in a limited war. MacArthur was so determined to destroy the NKPA that he was unable to grasp the overriding importance of the US policy of limiting the conflict. To achieve the lesser goal, he threatened the greater. Chinese intervention in the war was to extend the conflict for another two and a half years. Though not the sole cause for the Chinese action, the military's failure to observe political directives certainly contributed to prolonging the war.

In the end, the aggressor had been driven from South Korea and the ROK was secure. Despite the Chinese intervention, the war remained localized on the Korean peninsula. In short, the goals of the UN resolution of 27 June had been met. The US had proven the viability of the UN as an agent of collective security and had successfully contained a communist attempt to expand their sphere of influence. Yet there remains a sense of failure associated with Korea. Though the US did not lose, it is difficult to claim it won.

This feeling can be attributed to the fact that the settlement achieved in July 1953 was within reach by October 1950. The NKPA had been routed and UN forces were firmly in control of SK territory. On their own, the NKPA could

scarcely resume their attack in the foreseeable future. The Chinese and the Soviets had no excuse to intervene and probably would not have. This opportunity ended when first ROKA then other UN forces crossed the 38th parallel and US political objectives were changed to reflect those of the ROK. Under the threat of losing their nation, North Korea was unlikely to negotiate its absorption into the ROK.

Also contributing to the sense of failure is the inability to unify Korea when that objective also seemed within reach. The Chinese had threatened to intervene only if non-ROKA forces approached their border. Stated US policy clearly sought to alleviate Chinese fears, allowing only ROK forces in the border provinces of North Korea. MacArthur's inability -- or refusal -- to operate within this limitation precipitated the Chinese entry into North Korea. With China in the war, unification of Korea was no longer a realistic goal. Another chance to end the war quickly had eluded the US. The price of the next two and a half years of negotiations was steep. The return to the status quo ante bellum was unsatisfactory.

#### VIII. Implications.

In the broad sense, US national security policy has not changed drastically since the Korean war. Containment of communist expansion is still a recognized objective of US foreign policy. The current strategy of flexible response dictates that a conflict be resolved at the lowest possible

level. A limited conflict with constraints and restraints similar to those of the Korean war is more likely than a total war on a global scale. In light of this, the Korean war offers several important lessons for today's military leadership.

Foremost is the absolute necessity for the military commander to understand the political objectives which drive his military goals. He must be able to look beyond his immediate theater of operations and see the implications of his actions on a global scale. In this light, he must accept and follow restraints placed upon his actions. This will be particularly difficult when these restraints reduce his military efficiency and ultimately cost soldiers' lives. Yet subordination of the military to the civilian policymaker is fundamental to the US defense policy. The military must not only establish goals in support of policy, but also design operations to meet those goals within the limits dictated by national policy. MacArthur's failure to subscribe to this concept very probably prolonged the war by several years and most certainly brought the US several steps closer to the global war it so desperately wanted to avoid.

Secondly, is the need to have clearly stated goals in support of a recognized policy objective. If the goal is valid to start with, it should not be lightly changed. Military success or failure should not generate changes to political ends. The decision to cross the 38th parallel was made hastily in an atmosphere of euphoria resulting from the brilliant success at Inchon. The US political goal also



changed from defending the ROK and containment to unifying Korea and rolling back communism. While the desired ends changed, available ways and means did not. With no more resources and even greater restraints, MacArthur was asked to accomplish a great deal more than was originally planned. It is questionable whether his resources were sufficient to accomplish his ends within the given restraints. Not having additional resources, MacArthur decided to violate the restraints. This eventually resulted in Chinese intervention. Had US policy remained consistent -- repel the North Korean aggressors and secure the ROK -- both MacArthur's actions and the Chinese reaction could have been avoided. The end state achieved nearly three years later was not greatly different from that available to the US and UN on 1 October 1950. Allowing military opportunity to dictate national policy proved disastrous.

Finally, the Korean war demonstrated that the goals of members of a coalition must be compatible. UN forces operated most effectively when there was a clear consensus as to the proper political and military policies. Rifts that began to appear after UN forces crossed the 38th parallel may have encouraged the Chinese reaction. As disagreements between the US and the ROK as well as between the US and other UN command members became more obvious, the Chinese and North Koreans hardened their bargaining stance at the truce talks and intensified military operations. They apparently sought to destroy the unity of the UN command. Encouraged by signs of UN weakness, the communists extended the talks for two years.

Clausewitz wrote that war must be examined in light of three components: the people, the army and the government. <sup>36</sup>

War is most effectively waged when these three elements are in balance. When considered as part of a coalition, these elements must balance internally for each member and at the same time be compatible between members. When balance and compatibility exist, one gets Inchon and the breakout from Pusan. When internal balance fails, one gets MacArthur's violation of policy and the resulting Chinese intervention. When compatibility fails, one gets two year negotiations with a high price for little gain. In the complex environment of a limited war it will be extremely challenging to maintain this internal balance and coordinate a coherent coalition policy. However, the Korean war has shown that this balance and coordination is vital to achieving success.

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